

Work / Life

The Top Ten Ways to Lessen Your Stress Level During the Holidays

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NAVIGATOR

Holiday time is historically one of the most stressful times of the year for most people. What is for many a joyous, happy, and spiritually based day or time period is often comprised of frantic activities, shopping, gastronomic marathons, and an increase in both stress and illness. The following tips can help reduce the stress and prevent accompanying low energy levels that lead to susceptibility to illness, the "blues," fatigue, irritability, and a generally negative holiday experience.

1. Manage Your Time—Don't Let it Manage You

Decide what your priorities are regarding holiday events such as parties, family functions, gift buying, cooking, and all other related activities. Put them in order of priority and give yourself an ample time deadline for each thing. DO NOT wait until the last minute unless absolutely necessary, or it will be hard for you to not feel pressure and stress.

2. Do Not Over-Commit

Learn how to say no, with a smile and firm conviction. You only have so many days and hours to squeeze in family, friends, business get-togethers, gift buying, food preparation, gift wrapping, traveling, packing, etc. If you can "spare" some time to help others, fine. Make sure you have plenty of time to get your things done first however, and that whatever you commit to is within your physical and emotional abilities. If you find at the time a party or other event comes up that

you feel very tired or even ill, cancel or ask for help. Don't play "superman/woman."

Holidays are to be enjoyed. Less is often more and will also often be of higher quality.

3. Don't Take "Token" Time Off Work

Unless your profession requires you return to work the day after a major holiday, take an extra day or two, if the holiday doesn't spill over into a weekend, to recoup your physical and emotional strength. Happy times are every bit as stressful as sad or unpleasant events. Don't be fooled by thinking that holiday events cannot be very draining. If you work for yourself and plan ahead to do it, take 2 to 3 days after a major holiday to catch up on sleep, clean up your house, and travel home in a relaxed time frame.

4. If Possible, Don't Spend Holidays Alone

Holidays are not happy times for some people for various reasons. If you live alone and dread a particular holiday, spending it alone will usually add to you feeling depressed and very isolated. Whatever uncomfortable feelings you associate with a holiday will be exacerbated by spending it alone. If you have friends or relatives, see if you can join them for a part of it. If not, volunteer your time to work at a food center where the holiday dinner is served and prepared. Whatever you can do to get the focus out of yourself and the past the better off you will be. While remembering events or lost loved ones on holidays is fine and healthy, it need not be negative nor the entire focus of your holiday.

5. Avoid or be Very Moderate with Artificial "Stress Reducers"

Most holidays include the sharing or offering of alcoholic beverages. Since for many people alcohol is one way to combat stress and even despondency, it is wise to limit your intake if you wish to limit your stress.

Alcohol actually is only a temporary stress reducer. In large amounts, or in combination with a lot of chocolate and caffeine-laced food and drinks, it can actually cause your adrenal glands to secrete more adrenaline and other "stress hormones," causing you to feel a lot worse than if you had nothing to drink at all. Since alcohol is also a depressant, if you are feeling low, it will increase that feeling as well. Drink with food, and pace yourself. The best stress reducers are laughter, listening to and/or singing music, helping others, being loved and sharing love, and for many, communion with their church or faith through private or public ceremonies and events.

6. Accept Your Limitations

This is tough to do, since we often want to do all kinds of things on a holiday and don't realize how much time and energy they will take from us in the end. Think about what you really HAVE to do, and really WANT to do. Then think about what you realistically have adequate time and energy TO do. Follow those guidelines and you will perhaps do less and not see as many people, write as many holiday cards, or cook as many

cookies or pies, but you will be much less stressed and enjoy the holidays considerably more. Simple concept. Put it on paper and stick to it.

7. Help Others/Volunteer

This is especially good for the person who lives alone or is far from family and friends. New in town? Volunteer to work at a local church or shelter to help feed the homeless and the poor. Create your own sense of community by being with people who are also alone and, in most instances, far worse off than you physically, financially, and perhaps emotionally, as well. The more you give, the more you will get back in blessings and good feelings yourself. It may not happen the same day or all at once, but it will happen. When you see that the best gift you can give is yourself, your spirits will rise and be reinforced with a warmth and strength which is better and longer lasting than any gift or holiday party.

8. Prepare for Events in Stages

If you are going to be cooking for a large group on one or more occasion, shop ahead and prepare what you can ahead of time, whether it is the day before or the night before. Many types of casseroles, baked goods, and snacks can be made 1 to 2 days in advance and kept fresh in a freezer or refrigerator in sealed containers or their own cooking dish. If you have 100 cards to be addressed and mailed, block off 15 to 30 minutes every day to work on them, starting 2 to 3 weeks before they need to be mailed.

If they are custom cards, order them so you get them in good time to address them without rushing. Shop all year around for gifts. When you see a sale, look for possible gift ideas and put them away until the holiday comes! This alone can save much time and money—and you avoid the holiday crowds in the stores and malls. Cutting up your work in blocks of time instead of doing it all at once (with some exceptions) can cut your stress level by a large amount.

9. Use Your Computer to Shop and Send Greetings

Since such a huge number of people are online these days, one way to save time and energy is to do some of your shopping for gifts online. Most of the major gift and department stores have a Web site, and most also have their catalog or many items online.

You can also send very clever and attractive virtual holiday cards to friends, business associates, and family online. The majority of these sites' cards are 100 percent FREE. Email (especially if you have a

mail program with your friends listed so you can send the cards out to many at one time) is fast, cheap, and, if you are pressed for shopping time, can be a life saver sometimes!

10. Be Yourself: Drop Expectations of Yourself and Others

Every holiday is different, and each year the experience you have on the same holiday will vary. Placing expectations on yourself to cook the perfect meals, go to all the parties, pick the right gifts (in the right sizes and colors), and be entertained and entertain everyone is a setup for stress and disappointment. Plan what you want to do, do things in your own way, and accept the outcomes. You always do your best at the time. Your motives are good and loving. Accept that you will never be all things to all people. To try and be the perfect host or hostess, buy the perfect gift, and plan the flawless get-together is neither fair nor realistic. Be thankful and grateful you are able to do what you can do with the people you care about and love, and let it go at that.

Stress and post-holiday blues set in when we are overly stuck on how people will respond to our food, our gifts, or even our presence. Keep in mind why the holiday was originally created or named as a "holiday." Have fun in your own way, respect others to do the same, and take it a minute or an hour at a time and both your happiness level and your holiday experience will be enhanced and will not feel like a chore or an annual struggle or obligation.

(Source: Dennis R. Tesdell, Business and Personal Development Coach, lifecoach@coachdt.com)

WEB SITE PICKS

www.liquidsculpture.com

Stunning High Speed Photos of Splashing Water

Liquid Sculpture is a wonderful collection of high-speed photos of pouring and splashing liquids in



motion. The pictures are really striking, especially the shots done with viscous creams and colored liquids.

Silent gratitude isn't much good to anyone.

—Gladys Bronwyn Stern

HEALTHY FOOD TIP

Study Finds Walnuts are a Potent Source of Melatonin

Many think melatonin is something you can take to fall asleep after long airplane flights, but scientists are studying how this powerful antioxidant actually fights diseases like cancer, may impact diseases associated with aging, and likely will allow people to live healthier lives. Research at The University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio has proven walnuts are a natural source of melatonin.

According to Russell J. Reiter, Ph.D., Professor of Neuroendocrinology at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, "The ingredients in walnuts would be expected to reduce the incidence of cancer, delay or make less severe neurodegenerative diseases of aging, including Parkinsonism, Alzheimer's disease and reduce the severity of cardiovascular disease." Published in the September issue of *Nutrition: The International Journal of Applied and Basic Nutritional Sciences*, the study is titled "Melatonin in walnuts: Influence on levels of melatonin and total antioxidant capacity of blood."

Dr. Reiter's study found walnuts are a potent source of melatonin, which is easily absorbed in the body. "When walnuts are consumed, blood levels of melatonin increase threefold," notes Reiter. Studies have shown walnuts reduce the risk of heart disease due to their combination of healthy nutrients, including omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants. Reiter believes it is the synergy among the ingredients in walnuts—the combination of nutrients plus the melatonin—that makes them so beneficial. "Melatonin and omega-3s, both of which are in walnuts, starve cancers because they prevent the growth of cancer cells. When you take melatonin as a tablet, you are exclusively getting melatonin. I think the value of the walnut is the composite of what it contains.

(Source: *BUSINESS WIRE*. Sacramento, CA. September 13, 2005)

HUMOR

An artist asked the gallery owner if there had been any interest in his paintings on display at that time. "I have good news and bad news," the owner replied. "The good news is that a gentleman enquired about your work and wondered if it would appreciate in value after your death. When I told him it would, he bought all 15 of your paintings."



"That's wonderful!" the artist exclaimed.
"What's the bad news?"

"The guy was your doctor."

At her father's wake, a woman told her priest that ever since she was a child, she and her father had discussed life after death. They had agreed that whoever went first would try to contact the other. They had discussed it again only two weeks before his death. He died in her home, and a few hours later the smoke alarm in her garage went off. She had lived there for 28 years and it had never gone off before. She didn't know how to stop it and had to call the security company that had installed it.

The next morning, the smoke alarm sounded again—and the reason finally dawned on her. She said aloud, "Okay, Dad, I missed the signal yesterday, but I've got it now. Thanks for letting me know you're safe on the other side. Now turn the darn thing off so I don't have to call the security company again!" And it went off.

She immediately called her priest to relay the good news. His response: "Dear, if every time your father sends you a message, he sets off the SMOKE alarm, just where do you think he's calling from?"

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Focusing on the Best You *Comparing Yourself to Others*

Each of us has been blessed with unique qualities. No one else has lived through precisely the same circumstances, possesses exactly the same qualities, or thinks just the same thoughts. We love, appreciate, and hold dear vastly different things. Because of this, it is nearly impossible to justly compare oneself to others, and yet so many people stake their happiness on how they fare when measured against a neighbor, a coworker, a sibling, or a Hollywood star. It is easy to think that if you had her eyes, his house, her job, or his money that you'd be truly happy. Your value as a person has little to do with what you look like or what you possess, and comparing yourself to someone else denies your own wonderful gifts and talents. Everyone has worth, but the source of that worth is individual. Learning to stop comparing yourself to others begins with accepting your worth, because your own acceptance is the most important.

Regularly assessing your worth in terms of other people's gifts, be they talent, money, looks, or material wealth, can lead to dissatisfaction, even when you're on top of

your game. It's important to remember that you are you and will always be you, not someone else. Your individuality is something to take pride in. When you get the urge to compare yourself to someone else,



meditate on the fact that you are lovable, capable, and special the way you are. Instead of focusing on traits you don't possess and others do, or vice versa, concentrate on what you yourself have. You may be a great painter, very funny, or physically fit. Or you may be exceptionally organized, a capable parent, or profoundly patient. Usually, when we compare ourselves to others, we come out feeling devalued. In noting the positive differences both in yourself and the other party, you appreciate and foster distinctiveness.

The gifts which you have been given can be used for the benefit of everyone you come into contact with. Realizing and embracing such a concept enables you to focus on bringing out the best in yourself, so that you can celebrate your own achievements as well as those of others.

(Source: www.dailyom.com)

POINTS TO PONDER

Lovers of the English language might enjoy this. There is a word that has more meanings than any other two letter word, and that is "UP."

It's easy to understand UP, meaning toward the sky or at the top of the list, but when we awaken in the morning, why do we wake UP?

At a meeting, why does a topic come UP? Why do we speak UP and why are the officers UP for election and why is it UP to the secretary to write UP a report? We call UP our friends and we use something to brighten UP a room or polish UP the silver. We warm UP the leftovers and clean UP the kitchen. We lock UP the house and some people fix UP the old car.

At other times the little word has really special meaning. People stir UP trouble, line UP for tickets, work UP an appetite, and think UP excuses. To be dressed is one thing but to be dressed UP is special. And this is confusing: A drain must be opened UP because it is stopped UP. We open UP a store in the morning but we close it UP at night. We seem to be pretty mixed UP about UP!

To be knowledgeable about the proper uses of UP, look the word UP in the dictionary. In a desk-sized dictionary, it takes UP almost a quarter of the page and can add UP to about 30 definitions. If you are UP to it, you might try building UP a list of the many ways UP is used. It will take UP a lot of your time, but if you don't give UP, you may wind UP with a hundred or more.

When it threatens to rain, we say it is clouding UP. When the sun comes out we say it is clearing UP. When it rains, it wets UP the earth. When it doesn't rain for a while, things dry UP. One could go on and on, but I'll wrap it UP, for now my time is UP, so . . .

Time to shut UP . . . one more thing: What is the first thing you do in the morning and the last thing you do at night? U-P.

Don't put off for tomorrow what you can do today, because if you enjoy it today you can do it again tomorrow.

—James A. Michener

WORDS OF WISDOM

Our "Family" By Linda Snelson

My daughter Gina was in Mrs. Melton's fourth-grade class. After only a month in school, she began to come home on a regular basis asking for pencils, crayons, paper, etc. At first I just dutifully provided whatever she needed, never questioning her.

After ongoing requests for items that should have easily lasted for at least 6 weeks of fourth grade, I became concerned and asked her, "Gina, what are you doing with your school supplies?" She would always respond with an answer that satisfied me.

One day, after supplying the same thing only a week earlier, I became irritated with her pleading for more and sternly asked her once more, "Gina! What is going on with your school supplies?" Knowing her excuses would no longer work, she bent her head and began to cry. I lifted her tiny chin and looked into those big brown eyes, filled now with tears. "What?! What is wrong?" My mind was racing with all sorts of ideas. Had she been bullied by another child? Was she giving her supplies to him or her to keep from being hurt, or to gain approval? I couldn't imagine what was going on, but I knew it was something serious for her to cry. I waited for what seemed like an eternity for her to answer.

"Mom," she began, "there is a boy in my class; he doesn't have any of the supplies he needs to do his work. The other kids

make fun of him because his papers are messy and he only has two crayons to color with. I have been putting the new supplies you bought me in his desk before the others come in, so he doesn't know it's me. Please don't get mad at me, Mom. I didn't mean to tell you a lie, but I didn't want anyone to know it was me."

My heart sank as I stood there in disbelief. She had taken on the role of an adult and tried to hide it like a child. I knelt down and hugged her to me, not wanting her to see my own tears. When I pulled myself together, I stood up and said, "Gina, I would never get mad at you for wanting to help someone, but why didn't you just come and tell me?" I didn't have to wait for her to answer.

The next day I visited Mrs. Melton. I told her what Gina had said. She knew John's situation all too well. He was the oldest of four boys, and his parents had just moved here. When the school presented them with the school supply list for all four grades they were overwhelmed. When the boys came to school the next week, they barely had the necessities—a few sheets of paper and a pencil each.

I asked Mrs. Melton for the list from all four grades and told her I would take care of it the next day. She smiled and gave me the lists.

The next day, we brought the supplies in and gave them to the office with instructions to give them to the boys.

As Christmas neared, the thought of John, his brothers and family weighed heavily on my mind. What would they do? Surely they would not have money for gifts.

I asked Mrs. Melton if she could get me their address. At first she refused, reminding me that there was a policy that protected the privacy of the students, but because she knew me from my work at the school and involvement on the PTA board, she slipped a piece of paper into my hand and whispered, "Don't tell anyone I gave it to you."

When my family began to set the stage for our traditional Christmas Eve, which was usually held at my house, I simply told them all that my husband, the kids, and I did not want gifts, but instead we would prefer to have groceries and gifts for our "family."

As the girls and I shopped throughout the holiday season, they delighted in picking things out for the four boys. Gina was especially interested in things for John.

Christmas Eve came and my family began to arrive. Each of them had bags of food and gifts wrapped for the children. My living room was full and the excitement was contagious.

Finally we decided it was time to take our treasures to them. My brothers, dad, uncles, and nephews loaded up their trucks and set out for the apartment complex address that Mrs. Melton gave us.

They knocked on the door and a little boy appeared. They asked for his mother or dad and he ran away. The guys waited until a young man, hardly more than a child himself, came to the door. He looked at the men standing there, with arms full of gifts and bags full of groceries, and couldn't say a word. The men pushed past him and went straight to the kitchen counter to set the bags down.

There was no furniture. It was an empty, one-bedroom apartment with a few blankets on the floor and a small TV. A Christmas tree was the result of the kids bringing in a bush they had found in the field behind the complex. A few paper decorations made in their classrooms made it look like a real Christmas tree. Nothing was underneath.

The boys and their parents stood without speaking as the men set down bag after bag. They finally asked who had sent them, how did they know them, and so on. But the men just left them with shouts of "Merry Christmas!"



When the guys got back to my house they didn't say a word. They couldn't.

To break the silence, my aunt stood up and began to sing "Silent Night," and we all joined in.

When school resumed, Gina came home daily telling of John's new clothes and how the other children now played with him and treated him like the rest of the children.

She never told a soul at school about what we did, but every Christmas since that one she will say to me, "Mom, I wonder what happened to John and his family?" While I'm not quite sure of the answer, I'd like to think that John and his family were somehow helped by my daughter's gift.

(Source: *Chicken Soup* "Daily Serving")

FINANCES

Present Tense

Generally, putting a non-spouse's name on an account won't trigger a gift if assets aren't withdrawn by the new co-owner.



Suppose, for example, Jane Kennedy puts her nephew Lou's name on her checking account so that Lou can pay her bills if she becomes incapacitated. As long as Lou leaves the account alone, no gift is incurred.

However, if Lou takes \$25,000 from Jane's checking account, a gift tax return may have to be filed and gift tax might be owed. To prevent such problems, Lou should keep careful track of his use of Jane's assets. If Lou writes a \$25,000 check to a nursing home, for example, to provide care for Jane, no gift will have occurred.

On the other hand, if Lou writes that \$25,000 check to buy a car for himself, that would be a gift from Jane unless Lou can show that the car was used solely for Jane's care.

(Source: www.fedweek.com)

Questions/comments to:

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An online version of this newsletter may be found at http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/codecc/Pages/navig_12_05.pdf.
